

# Literature and Psychology

THE QUARTERLY NEWS LETTER OF THE CONFERENCE ON LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

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Ce n'est pas tout de rassis entendement de nous juger simplement par nos actions de dehors. Il faut sonder jusqu'au dedans et voir par quels ressorts se donne le branle; mais d'autant que c'est une hasardeuse et haute entreprise, je voudrais que moins de gens s'en mêlassent.

--Michel de Montaigne  
De l'Inconstance

[Suggested by E.B.M.]

This issue is devoted to a discussion of a leading article by Erwin Steinberg which appeared in LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY just one year ago. The principal paper, by Professor Wyatt, seems to us to represent a sound and valuable explication of psychodynamics. That was to be expected, for Dr. Wyatt is the Chief of the Psychological Clinic and Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. It is also first-rate literary criticism as well, a sound and valuable contribution to the study of Virginia Woolf. To discount any possible surprise on that score, Dr. Wyatt has written us as follows:

Although active in Psychology now for two decades I have had a fairly regular training in Literature. There is also a history of earlier trespassing on this field such as a paper on "A Prediction over a Century," papers on Radio serials, and most recently, on the psychological attractions of a best selling novel.

The text of Dr. Wyatt's paper was submitted before publication to Dr. Steinberg and Mr. Lesser. The former has availed himself of the opportunity to make a brief reply. The latter, whose paper on "Some Unconscious Elements in the Response to Fiction" (September, 1953) presented a viewpoint very close to that of Dr. Wyatt, has undertaken the role of umpire and conciliator. Further (brief) comments are solicited.

## SOME COMMENTS ON THE USE OF SYMBOLS IN THE NOVEL

The point of departure for this essay is an article by Dr. Erwin Steinberg<sup>1</sup> in which he complains about the difficulties brought upon the unsophisticated reader by the use of certain symbols in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>2</sup> In an

\*This issue of the News Letter is made up at George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, and is distributed from that address.

1. Erwin Steinberg, "Freudian Symbolism and Communication," *Literature and Psychology*, Vol. III, 2, April, 1953.

2. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, New York, The Modern Library, 1928.

analysis of salient passages Dr. Steinberg shows that it is not the use of these psychoanalytic symbols by themselves which obstructs understanding, but the failure to relate them to traditional imagery. In this respect, he suggests, Virginia Woolf was more successful in her later novel, To the Lighthouse. Steinberg's criticism is directed against a barrier in communication. One must assume then that there would be no reason for criticizing this method of expression if (1) readers could be presumed to be commonly familiar with psychoanalytic symbols, or (2) if writers (in this case: Virginia Woolf) would graft the novel symbols gleaned from psychoanalysis upon the healthy trunk of traditional imagery.

Granting the premise, the point is clear: if writers desire to communicate their vision to the world, they are entirely within their rights to employ whatever device will help put across what they wish to say. But using a code which only a few can read, the writer will evidently defeat his aim. Dr. Steinberg tells us that this was brought home to him by the observations that his students were not able to comprehend the meaning of one of the figures in Mrs. Dalloway (Peter Walsh) who is characterized through a habit of symbolic duplicity. What looks like a mannerism is in reality a phallic symbol. Of course, a variety of reasons might account for the failure of readers to appreciate this or that aspect of the novel. It may be wise therefore to turn back at this point to the premise upon which the argument rests.

Dr. Steinberg's argument takes for granted that Virginia Woolf uses the symbols of psychoanalysis consciously and intentionally; and that the effect of fiction in which symbols are so employed on the reader is dependent upon consciously understanding them. From what we know about symbols, about the creative process, and the receptive experience of its products, this is, however, a rather doubtful proposition. It would be more plausible to regard the passage in question as the formulation of a composite experience, of attitudes, sensibilities, and idiosyncrasies which naturally bind together the thought-out and the sensed, the rational and the instinctual, the orderly and the diffusely pre-logical; so that there would be no need for bolstering its substance with the props of specified symbols.

Returning to the premises, we must assume (1) that Virginia Woolf was not only sufficiently impressed, but also familiar enough with the psychoanalytic theory of symbols to insert them into her novel with conscious intent. We must, of course, believe (2) that the passages of which Dr. Steinberg speaks really designate phallic symbols; and we must accept the even more fundamental notion (3) that symbols can be used consciously in literature.

Concerning the first, the evidence is scant. To Dr. Hoops, who gathered material on the effect of psychoanalysis on English writers, Virginia Woolf wrote that she did not know any more about psychoanalysis than what she heard in conversations.<sup>3</sup> This does not seem to be a great deal. On the other hand, Ernst Kris,<sup>4</sup> commenting on this comment, reminds us that Virginia Woolf's

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3. R. Hoops, "Der Einfluss der Psychoanalyse auf die Englische Literature," Anglistische Forschungen, LXXVII.

4. Ernst Kris, "Freudianism and the Literary Mind," in Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, New York, International Universities Press, 1952. As a matter of internal evidence, the Bradshaw passages (p. 144 et passim) make it appear very unlikely that Virginia Woolf was familiar with the aims and with the technique of the psychoanalytic interview.

brother was a well-known English psychoanalyst. This leaves us none the wiser; for there have been other sisters of well-known specialists who took care not to know the glory of their brother's subject in any detail. In the absence of any positive acknowledgment of psychoanalysis on Virginia Woolf's part, of which neither biography nor commentary mentions anything, we are reduced to waiting for cues which might be forthcoming at some future date. We cannot say that Virginia Woolf was in no way affected by psychoanalysis, which in view of her time, her intellectual milieu, and her own scope, is indeed unlikely. Leonard Woolf certainly founded and directed the Hogarth Press; and the Hogarth Press not only published Freud's works, but for some time a major volume of psychoanalytic writing in England. Neither can we say that Virginia Woolf did indeed apply her interest in psychoanalysis actively to her writing since we do not have any direct evidence for it. This does not exclude the possibility that her work makes profound psychological sense, as we shall see later.

What do the passages in Mrs. Dalloway express which are here in question? Everything that we wish to put into them as long as it amounts to a "plausible harmony" (Balthasar Gracian) in the end. In the absence of any definite statement of the author's intent, the decision lies with the reader, and especially with the critics. Any passage means what at a given time we can suggest it ought to mean from all we know that might have affected the writer and his work. For unless he has left us with definite instructions we can do nothing but draw what is plausible from all the circumstances involved; those of the writer and of his aims, his times and their inclinations, and of the form and enduring function of literary expression itself. Obviously we are meeting here with one of the major problems of criticism with which we are not prepared to deal. As we have no evidence of what Virginia Woolf intended, we must ask how just how likely it is that an artist in her time and intellectual place would make conscious use of the kind of symbols Freud described some twenty-five years before. As in the geodetic survey of a point which cannot itself be reached, and so is assayed by measuring points nearby whence its position will then be estimated, we shall have to approach a specific question from its general circumambience.

If we were asked bluntly whether writers do or do not use psychoanalytic symbols with conscious design, we again cannot offer any clear-cut answer. Why, we would say, some may do so, although at the moment none come to mind. Consider the question then with a view to the dynamics of which the symbols is a manifestation. Let us be sure, first of all, that the fascinating (and fashionable) symbols which represent a wish or instinctual need are only one species in the breadth and depth of symbolic phenomena. In this general sense the symbol is probably a basic mode of thinking or "minding," and hence a problem of great consequence both for psychology and for literature. Until rather recently psychoanalysis has identified and utilized symbols largely by their content.

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5. David Daiches, Virginia Woolf, New York, New Directions, 1942.

6. Bernard Blackstone, Virginia Woolf, a Commentary, London, The Hogarth Press, 1949. Also: Bernard Blackstone, Virginia Woolf, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1952.

7. For the scope of this problem beyond Psychoanalysis, see: Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man, Garden City, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953. Also: Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1946. See also: Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, New York, Mentor Books, 1952.

They involve, of course, fundamental problems of structure and function, too, which have recently become the subject of systematic attention.<sup>8</sup>

The symbols as the expression of instinctual need was first studied in the dream. There the condition of its occurrence was found in the reduction of consciousness enjoined by the physiological state of sleep. In a dream Peter Walsh's pocket knife could well signify an instinctual need, an inchoate aim, or more precisely a synthesis of three major determinants: need, social value, and a specific mode of thinking which works by analogy and allusion, and part-for-the-whole representation in a state of relatively amorphous experience akin to archaic or pre-logical thinking. Freud called the mode or measure of this kind of ideation the "primary process." It occurs also outside the dream, in folklore and myth, in innumerable small incidents of everyday life, and in the ideation underlying neurotic disturbances. Fantasy, the autonomous issuing of images, is not peculiar to the dream; neither is pre-logical thinking. Reasoning is suffused with the non-reasoned, unattended merging and parting of images, and their unfolding and folding-back into each other. Around the shifting focus of consciousness and goal-directed organization there are spheres of decreasing awareness usually taken up with images of internal autistic needs, and presented through prelogical modes of ideation whence they often reach into, and affect, rational thought.

The dream symbol in the strict sense of the word does, however, not occur in this stage of fringe consciousness (marginal awareness). In the dream the symbol has an independent factual reality. A pocket knife is in all seriousness a pocket knife. Only from a certain inconsistency of context do we conclude that it also realizes a psychological need, for tumescence or for reassurance, as the case may be. In a waking state the same need could certainly express itself in the wish to fondle the pocket knife in the middle of conscious and rational behavior, and in the marginal pleasure which Peter Walsh derives from an action of which he is hardly aware. It would not have the quality of an image set off independently and perceived by itself yet standing for something else as the symbol does; but would be a vaguely needed, vaguely satisfying event differentiated from other behavior. Its meaning would be obscure although it would probably lead to, or from, other images connected with it.

A writer might contrive dream symbols, but he could not genuinely seize upon them as he does with so many other psychological relations. For the spontaneous occurrence of dream symbols the dream is a condition. It is not only possible, but, fortunately, common that writers present the confluence of rational observation with preconscious modes of thinking in one living impression. The writer's knowledge of human affairs, after all, comes not only from assiduous note-taking, but from the intensified awareness of his own participation in the common human predicaments of instinctual prompting, conflict, and substitution. Having grown up like others, he has the same repository of pre-logical ideation interlacing with the accomplishments of rational thinking. In

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8. David Rapaport, Organization and Pathology of Thought, New York, Columbia University Press, 1951. For the technique of psychoanalytic dream interpretation, see: Ella Freeman Sharpe, Dream Analysis, London, The Hogarth Press, 1951. For recent advances see also: Robert Fliess, The Revival of Interest in the Dream, New York, International Universities Press, 1953.

fact, the special proficiency of a writer consists just in his access to pre-conscious sources of experience. He is able to do, or at any rate to do better, what others can do only on a small and flighty scale--namely, to grasp and manipulate and integrate the imagery of the preconscious with his conscious purpose.<sup>9</sup> He, too, as a rule, does not know what he is doing when he performs this synthesis. There is, however, no mystic insinuation in this. Quite obviously writers, like other artists, work hard and consciously on the organization of many different sources of experience. This does not imply, however, that they know the meaning of every strand in their texture. From here it would seem quite pointless for the writer to employ symbols intentionally. Who would want to carry in water from the well when there is running water inside?

As Freud did not tire of pointing out, the artist always had what the psychologist only lately put into systematic form. <sup>prestige</sup> This may not keep the ambitious writer from exploiting what has at present high value, while for others it may serve as a prop when spontaneity fails. However, a writer of the extreme sensitivity and psychological sagacity of Virginia Woolf certainly had no need for symbolic props. That she should have employed them consciously, as a gimmick, is also contradicted by the consistent picture of her intellectual pride and honesty, and her fiery conviction of the autonomy of the literary artist. The assumption that Virginia Woolf used symbols intentionally in Mrs. Dalloway was not well founded to begin with. At this point it becomes onerous.

What then is a plausible meaning for the passage under scrutiny? It seems to me that these passages are, first of all, exactly what they profess to be: a demonstration of Peter's unconventionality and lack of feeling for the sensibilities of others, disarmingly wrapped up in his boyish charm. Peter's habit contains for Mrs. Dalloway all that made him at once deeply attractive to her while irritating her desperately at the same time. His fiddling with the pocket knife represents to her qualities of a character that must forever entrance and repel her, and when she has been upset by this irreconcilable conflict, make her take refuge in her coldness, her propriety, and her social compliance. In the structure of the novel the pocket knife incidents serve also to balance Clarissa's jealousy, and to sum up the question for which there were no answers in her life--namely, whether she should have married Peter. Peter's habit exposes Clarissa Dalloway's unresolved ambiguity of character which is in the end the core of the book and its latent tragedy. On this level alone Peter's antics make perfectly consistent psychological sense.

On another ("deeper" because less accessible) level Peter's playing with his pocket knife denotes the fateful problem of his character; his self-absorbed boyish brusqueness which makes him hurt others, especially Clarissa, and disrupt his own life, if not intentionally, so irresistibly. From the evidence of his behavior which is reported throughout the book, we can construct a personality whose manifest conduct could then be related to certain unconscious problems in the way psychoanalysis conceives them. When we do this we shall keep well in mind that the characters in a novel are not people who have come to us for psychotherapy. Confusing the two, the characters of a book and a patient, whose conduct we try to trace back to its hidden springs over many

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9. "Books are the flowers or fruit stuck here and there on a tree which has its roots deep down in the earth of our earliest life, of our first experiences." Mrs. Dalloway, p. vi (l. c.). For one of the most important among recent theoretical contributions to this subject, see: Ernst Kris, "On Preconscious Mental Processes" (l. c.).

hours of work, would only lead to absurdity.<sup>10</sup> We can therefore not say: That's Peter Walsh's neurosis; we can only say that the traits by which he is described are so eminently right that without further rendering they could be treated as if they were the manifest data of a case history. The following psychological reconstruction has no other purpose than to demonstrate the cogency of Virginia Woolf's characterization. Peter Walsh looks like a man who has never been able to give up the need for the direct and immediate autoerotic gratifications of infancy. He has only shifted to playing with something else. He has not developed beyond the simple, direct fascination with his own masculinity into a more inclusive attitude where people matter, instead of parts of the body, and mutualness rather than possession and power. In spite of his imposing, Peter is not secure on this primitive level. He had held on not only to a naive and autistic form of pleasure-getting and self-asserting but has also loaded himself with the anxieties that almost inevitably follow therefrom. He acts as if he had to reassure himself at every turn that he, or rather what is in this primitive conception most important of himself, is still all right. He has to do so especially whenever a situation seems to close in upon him which might upset or arouse him--as if he were frightened by a specter or perhaps by the very force of his excitement. He acts in a circle: he plays with his knife in order to defend himself against the punishment he fears unknowingly for that which he has displaced into knife-playing. So he will mechanically reach for his knife and reassure himself and his sharp-edged boyish pride lest he might be overwhelmed by some hostile power, by loneliness or some ineluctable anguish of life, or even by love.

Clarissa's picture, even more than Peter's, has the mark of a convincing rightness on every level that we want to hold against the factual data of human lives. We can limit ourselves to the unresolved and unresolvable relationship to Peter. There is too much in Peter that Clarissa would like to be herself, ever to let her come to peace with him. Clarissa's choice was aggravated by the fact that Peter was able to attract but not to hold her; he could tempt but offer no security. After the conflict had been going on for some time, Clarissa decided for Richard Dalloway. He was safe in two ways: in his unimaginative goodness there was loyalty; at the same time he was no threat to Clarissa's brittle self-regard. Peter was brilliant and unsteady. His menace was that of a man who would always insist on being better than she. Dalloway could be relied upon and would be no challenge. Peter's fascination lay in his rebelliousness, his independence, his defying of convention, in the end in his instinctual appetites of which his pocket knife ceremony forever bragged. In her very fascination with these traits, however, lay Clarissa's dangers. "If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!" she says at one point. She must have also asked herself whether she could take the dangers of this temptation and the risks of so much freedom. Not without reason is Septimus Smith the counterpart and double of Clarissa Dalloway.<sup>11</sup> Isolated and

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10. For a similar point of view, see: William J. Griffin, "The Uses and Abuses of Psychoanalysis in the Study of Literature," *Literature and Psychology*, Vol. I, 5-6, 1951. In this connection, and throughout, see also the excellent essay by Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," in *The Liberal Imagination*, Garden City, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953.

11. Virginia Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. vi.

relegated to him are the morbid sensitivities and pathological liabilities which again, if Clarissa's traits as manifestly reported in the novel were the life data of a person, a psychologist might infer. No mother appears in Clarissa's life,<sup>12</sup> only a stern old aunt and an opinionated, querulous father. From the overwhelming effect on her of the relationship to another young woman--Sally--one would wonder whether Clarissa had enough of that fundamental affection in which so much later security is rooted. Her coldness and her propriety are necessary defences to her and the identification with an external order and its tradition-bound rules which serves to keep herself together.

Both Clarissa's and Peter's basic problems manifest themselves in their relationship to each other: Clarissa's unresolved problem of role causes her to be drawn to Peter; Peter's possessiveness and unbridled need for love tie him to Clarissa. Were he a living person, one would again surmise that in the impulsive urgency of his need for love and in Clarissa's capacity for calm protectiveness converge his own unsettled and ambivalent cravings for a mother. Either wish has its own danger. Having stayed behind when other aspects of personality developed further, either seeks in an adult partner something that has its place only in childhood. Either wish is ambivalent; either is bound to lead to disappointment. Clarissa resigns; Peter continues to protest.

This may give an account of the psychological perspectives of the pocket knife scene although it does not by any means exhaust it. We must ask now what the reader may perceive in these passages and in the novel as a whole. Unless he is familiar with the covert implications of manifest behavior, he will not know how to appreciate the characters in the novel in the terms of psychoanalytic psychology, and thus, presumably, understand it more profoundly. Would he really lose anything? I do not think so. The reader can take what the writer has to give, and exactly for the same reason. Both carry with them the capacity for global and syncretic experience as well as the hidden presence of preconscious imagery. If the one can present a polyphonus script, the other as a rule can read it by virtue of a similar preparation through the vicissitudes of his own biological development. The qualification of the writer is that he has access to these levels of experience so that he can recreate them in a seemingly rational order. When he describes he not only manipulates the objective events that can be seen and heard; he also suggests or hints by the way he selects and organizes his subject, as he has to describe in a few strokes what in reality has many more features. The very arrangement, the choice and organization will at the same time intimate the consonance of those levels of experience which in themselves do not seem to have any room in the objective means of communication. The writer manipulates the auras and halos of meaning. Together with the succinct image he solicits the inchoate and dormant, the long-latent and inarticulate. Language, by its very nature, has the facilities built into it for conveying the pre-logical together with the logical. The writer's job is to uncover and realize them. The reader, in point of fact, perceives a printed line, a tentative configuration of words. Yet even if he is unsophisticated he cannot help but apperceive a symphonic score of meaning. While he reads of one concrete and rational plane, he responds on several planes of experience simultaneously. The polyphony of associations is his own. It is his basic human endowment.

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12. With one veiled exception (p. 267) which yet seems to bear out the interpretative construction suggested here.

When the novel is "right" in what it suggests about Clarissa and Peter, next or beneath what is said in words about them the reader will understand though he may not know it.<sup>13</sup> More than others Virginia Woolf abounds in penetrating insights into the cross-currents of the moment. She leaves with the reader the intimation of an enormous sensitivity, of a vibrant ether beyond the confines of a self; a nervous universal consciousness with an Orphean sense which sees all, hears all, and feels all. More than other writers she is at home in the fringes of awareness. Why would she need to manipulate phallic symbols which have their good place in the natural history of instinct but not in a mediated presence of human life? For both writer and reader it is essentially irrelevant to know what a phallic symbol is. What matters is for the one to set up in words and for the other to grasp and revive in his own mind an experience with which they are both deeply familiar. If either of them happens also to be familiar with the conceptual system which psychoanalysis uses for its theory of character, this may well add to the scope and depth of the experience; although I wonder whether the writer in applying a perspective which is so essentially alien to his task would not interfere with it more than further it.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of dynamic (psychoanalytic) propositions is to differentiate what is obscure or not conscious at all. The purpose of characterization in literature is to reflect and express the preconscious aspects of experience as genuinely as the conscious ones. With too much systematic equipment the novel might become a psychological tract. Principally, when the effect of literature is examined, the knowledge, or ignorance, of psychoanalytic concepts is beside the point. The reader has all he needs unless he has lived like Kaspar Hauser or, more likely, unless his cultural training has prejudiced him against some kinds of literary vision, or perhaps against all.

In concluding we might digress to consider what the place of the psychologist is in commenting on literary material. He can certainly not be barred from using at his own discretion the enormous store of observations on man--the greatest by definition--which literature provides. In borrowing from it his aims will necessarily vary. What he does, then, need certainly not make sense to anybody who is not familiar with the aims and problems of psychology. If he points out a facet or a connection which discloses itself only to his specialized attention (his "set"), he may not have added to the cause of literature, but he should not be censured either until he has had an opportunity to explain his frame of reference. While he uses the conceptual tools of psychology he has of course nothing to say about the indigenous literary quality of his subject and should not forget that a novel is first and by intent an incident of literary creation and only secondarily a cache of psychological data. If he insists on putting himself beyond these rules he will succeed only in making himself a crushing bore. On the other hand, if the man of letters is offended by the more obtuse forays of psychology (after he wakes up to the fact that he was also a little awed by it), he should remember that each age so far has had its own

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13. See, however, for the opposing view, E. Steinberg: "It could be argued that even if a reader does not understand the symbols, they nevertheless communicate. But to respond to a symbol is not the same as understanding it consciously, and the symbolism here must be clearly understood if Peter is to be understood." *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

14. "...the writer as artist cannot work within the Freudian or any other system of thought and still produce art." Wayne Burns, "Freudianism, Criticism, and *Jane Eyre*," *Literature and Psychology*, Vol. II, 5, 1952.

Arcanum, and a brisk trade in pocket oracles at popular prices. Could it be that the purveyors of revelation are bent on impressing the public because they have not done too well by themselves? At any rate, if they speak in tongues, it has never yet had any serious effect upon literature which goes on by its own impulses, whatever the current fashion in infallibility. Or, in Goethe's comforting words:

Wir reiten in die Kreuz und Quer  
Nach Freuden und Geschäften;  
Doch immer Klafft es hinterher  
Und billt aus allen Kräften.  
So will der Spitz aus unserm Stall  
Uns immerfort begleiten  
Und seines Bellens lauter Schall  
Beweist nur, dass wir reiten.

--Frederick Wyatt  
Department of Psychology  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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#### NOTE ON A NOVELIST TOO QUICKLY FREUDENED

Perhaps what must be said of the article by Dr. Wyatt is that he and I can only agree to disagree. As I read Mrs. Dalloway, the key to understanding Peter Walsh is his handling of his knife. To me, that mannerism represents his unexpressed--and unexpressible--masculinity and aggression.<sup>1</sup> For, as I pointed out in my paper, Peter plays with his knife not only in Clarissa's presence (as Dr. Wyatt's discussion seems to suggest), but also when he sees and follows an attractive young woman on the street.<sup>2</sup> And for anyone who understands Freudian symbolism, it seems to me that Peter's opening the big blade of his knife as he anticipates entering the open door of a brightly lighted house--Clarissa's house--can have only one meaning.<sup>3</sup>

As to whether Virginia Woolf was conversant with Freudian psychology when she wrote Mrs. Dalloway, we shall have to await further evidence. I do not see how, traveling in the circles she did, she could have failed to develop at least an intellectual tourist's eye-view of the then new and exciting theories. But then, of course, my repeating this statement or the inconclusive evidence in my earlier paper does not make it so.

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1. For a fuller discussion of the points in this paragraph, the reader should refer to the article which evoked Dr. Wyatt's paper: "Freudian Symbolism and Communication," Literature and Psychology, Vol. III, 2, April, 1953.

2. Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1925), p. 79.

3. Ibid., p. 250.

Unfortunately the recently published excerpts from Mrs. Woolf's diary tell us little in this connection. They do provide evidence that she was forever experimenting with techniques and style.<sup>4</sup> And the same volume informs us that she was conscious of her use of symbols, although it does not say what kind of symbols.<sup>5</sup> The published material, however, is only a very small portion of the original twenty-six volumes of diary.<sup>6</sup> And to subtract further from its value as evidence, we learn from Leonard Woolf in the introduction that he has included only material "which referred to her own writing." Reports of conversations which she had about other matters have quite obviously been excluded, as have, presumably, her reports on much of what she read. Thus the excerpts shed no light on her knowledge of Freudian psychology at the time she wrote Mrs. Dalloway.

Mr. Wyatt's discussion of the way in which artists generally create (that is, their drawing on a vast fund of cultural, psychological, and personal material, much of it inextricably interrelated and even pre-logical) is quite in keeping with current theory as his documentation shows, and is to me, at least, thoroughly acceptable. But that discussion cannot possibly be used as an argument to deny that artists often draw quite consciously upon philosophic systems or even use such systems as a framework around which to build a major work. Joyce used Vico's theories, for example, as a basis for Finnegans Wake; and we are told that Proust used Bergson's in Remembrance of Things Past. Joyce used psychological concepts, too; and if I may be allowed a judgment here which I hope soon to substantiate at some length, his attempts to incorporate these concepts in his work on occasion interfered with his communication with his reader. The price of experiment for all authors (including Virginia Woolf) is sometimes obscurity.

Ultimately, however, my "case" rests upon my classroom experience and the similar experience of one of my colleagues. In four different sections of a course in the modern novel involving about one hundred students and extending over a period of two years, we found no real understanding of Peter Walsh. His personality, his motivation, his relationship with Clarissa--none of these was understandable to the students until they were introduced to the passages on phallic symbolism in The Interpretation of Dreams. After such an introduction, however, Peter invariably fell into focus for them. I would still argue, therefore, that whether Virginia Woolf consciously used Peter's knife as a phallic symbol or not, one cannot understand Peter unless one understands the symbolic meaning of his playing with his knife. And I would argue further that in 1954 (and certainly in 1925, when Mrs. Dalloway was published) any book which depends

4. Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary. (ed. by Leonard Woolf) (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954), *passim*.

5. During her writing of To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Woolf comments at one point, "I am making more use of symbolism, I observe..." *Ibid.*, p. 100. The rest of the passage, however, does not give any indication of what type of symbols she was conscious of using.

6. From the first mention of Mrs. Dalloway on June 23, 1922, to the approximate date of its publication, April, 1925--almost three years; approximately 1000 days for possible entries--there are only thirty-two entries. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-70.

7. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

on a conscious understanding of Freudian symbolism for an understanding of its central meaning will communicate only to a relatively few people.

I should point out here that I am not arguing against the use of any particular symbolism per se. I am merely suggesting that a writer should not use any symbolism before he has assimilated it and related it to the rest of his understanding and techniques. My original paper was my (perhaps inadequate) attempt to show that whereas Virginia Woolf had not assimilated the concept of phallic symbolism by the time of her writing Mrs. Dalloway, and thus used it awkwardly, she had assimilated it by the time she wrote To the Lighthouse, and thus used it effectively.

In closing, I must apologize for one expression that I seem to have given in my paper. I did not mean to suggest that Freudian symbolism must--or even should--be buried in traditional imagery. My example from To the Lighthouse was meant to show merely that psychoanalytic symbols when skillfully employed (that is, when an understanding of a passage or a book does not stand or fall just on an understanding of them) can communicate and add additional levels of meaning to a work of art.

--Erwin R. Steinberg  
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#### ARBITRATION AND CONCILIATION

I am a prejudiced reader of Dr. Wyatt's article for in The Appeal of Fiction I try to develop the same point which it seems to me he is making--that some of the deeper implications of fiction are unconsciously communicated and that this is just as it should be. Prejudiced or no, I should like to express my admiration and mention one or two additional considerations which seem to me to support Dr. Wyatt's contention. At the same time I should like to introduce a distinction which may help to resolve the issue between Dr. Wyatt and Dr. Steinoerg--a step I undertake with full appreciation of the occupational hazards of being an umpire!

Not only those portions of fiction which we arbitrarily (and, in some respects, unfortunately) separate and call "symbols" but, by and large, all of fiction is expressed in a language of concrete characters and incidents--a kind of clarified and objectified version of the language of fantasies and dreams. I think that there can be no question that this language is immediately intelligible--in part consciously but in larger part unconsciously. It would indeed be carrying coals to Newcastle to translate any large portion of what we understand into conceptual terms or to verbalize our understanding in any fashion. It is already couched in a language which is easier to understand and more congenial to our minds than words--an imagistic language which is a precursor of words and of thought.<sup>1</sup> Though all but such newer forms of fiction as motion

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<sup>1</sup>. Cf. Freud: "...what has to be accomplished by the dream-work is the transformation of the latent thoughts, as expressed in words, into perceptual forms, most commonly into visual images. Now our thoughts originated in such

pictures

/and television dramas are "written" in words, fiction registers upon our minds largely in terms of sense impressions; it is understood, to an unappreciated extent, non-discursively. Our curiosity, our desire to learn what happens next, which impels us to read fiction at a fairly rapid rate, would discourage us from verbalizing most of what we understand even if there were any incentive for us to do so.

Dr. Wyatt maintains that nothing is lost because what, for convenience, we may call the latent content of fiction is unconsciously understood. I would go farther; I would maintain that a great deal would be lost if its meaning were transcribed and consciously apprehended. In the first place the imagistic language of fiction is not only more quickly understood than conceptual discourse; it has an immediacy, vividness and impact which are ideally suited to fiction's endeavor to make its events seem "real" and to arouse us, and even involve us, emotionally. Moreover, as I try to show in great detail in The Appeal of Fiction, many of the deeper and "darker" things communicated through fiction would arouse anxiety if consciously perceived--so much anxiety in some instances as to disrupt our absorption in a story and preclude enjoyment.

Though space limitations do not permit me to develop the point, I suspect that the writer of fiction is influenced, perhaps even more powerfully, by these same factors. When writers deal with their most sternly repressed impulses, as the greatest invariably do, I believe that they not only are not, but must not, be aware of the deeper implications of what their stories express. To become aware of those implications would weaken one of the incentives for writing (the desire to deal in indirect fashion with an unresolved, and usually unidentified, problem) and in some cases mobilize so much anxiety as to make it impossible for them to write.

Dr. Steinoerg appears to believe that unconscious understanding is not enough, that readers must consciously grasp the meaning of symbols before it can be claimed that communication occurs. But the whole context of his argument makes me suspect that this is not really what he believes. Indeed, in a kind of "return of the repressed" footnote which does him credit he makes a concession which I think is highly significant: he points out that unconsciously Clarissa fully understands--and, as he later points out responds to--the unconscious significance of Peter's habit of playing with his knife. I am confident that the better readers among Dr. Steinberg's students understand and respond in precisely the same fashion.

What troubles Dr. Steinoerg, I suspect, is the obtuseness some of his students display when they are asked to put what they understand into words. But this activity, this necessary but never more than partially successful endeavor to verbalize our understanding of a story, is part of the task of criticism. It is often undertaken as a preliminary to a more inclusive analysis of a story or to an attempt to explain its effect upon us, activities which we unhesitatingly assign to criticism.

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perceptual forms; their earliest material and the first stages in their development consisted of sense-impressions, or, more accurately, of memory-pictures of these. It was later that words were attached to these pictures and then connected so as to form thought." A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis. (New York: Garden City, 1938), p. 160.

It is highly important in my opinion that all the activities comprising criticism, including this early one, should be sharply distinguished from the reading experience itself. Though they are of course based upon that experience, in another sense they do not begin until it has been completed; and they differ from it in essence. They are predominantly intellectual. They do require us to think conceptually and, to some extent, systematically.

It is in connection with the tasks which pertain to criticism that the body of knowledge put at our disposal by Freud and his followers is of such extraordinary value. Were it not for irrational resistances, I think it would be immediately apparent to everyone that it provides a resource of revolutionary importance for explicating the meaning of fiction and accounting for its impact upon us. On the other hand, I believe that the effects of utilizing this (or any other) knowledge self-consciously as we read would be unfortunate. Among other things, it would jeopardize responses which, analyzed, might be the source of some of our most valuable critical insights. Fortunately, as it seems to me, certain characteristics of fiction, human beings, and the reading experience make it unlikely that most readers will pause to dissect as they read more than momentarily.

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#### BIBLIOGRAPHY (XIV)

A few items from a recent list of publications by the University of Pennsylvania Press:

Gaylord C. LeRoy, Perplexed Prophets (1954),

Ernest Earnest, S. Weir Mitchell: Novelist and Physician (1950),

Otto Rank, Psychology and the Soul (translation by William D. Turner of Seelenglaube und Psychologie) (1950),

Edward D. Snyder, Hypnotic Poetry: A Study of Trance-Inducing Techniques in Certain Poems and Its Literary Significance (1930).

For the work first mentioned the Press makes the following interesting claim:

Dr. LeRoy believes that we can better understand the work of...all the Victorians if we know how they adjusted (or failed to adjust) to their changing times. Unifying psychological and social analysis, he reconstructs the environment which surrounded each of the six writers [Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, Thomson, Rossetti, Wilde] and studies the nature of their individual response to it....Here is criticism different from that most popular today. Looking beyond the analysis of theme and symbolism alone, it is the kind of criticism students will come to expect as standard in the ever expanding occupation of literary study.

The New York Times Book Review for January 31, 1954, reviewed works dealing with two great names in psychoanalysis:

Robert Lindner, (ed.), Explorations in Psychoanalysis, A Tribute to the Work of Theodor Reik,

Hanna Fenichel and David Rapaport (eds.), The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel. First Series.

In commenting upon the Festschrift in honor of a healer and writer who has 153 publications to his credit, the reviewer, Dr. Herman Vollmer, tempers the old Freudian cliché about psychoanalysis and art with a tribute to Reik's tremendous share in causing that cliché to become outmoded:

Freud himself declared that psychoanalysis must lay down its arms before the problem of art. We should leave it at that unless it is done, as Reik attempted, with intuitive, artistic approach--and with devotion.

And finally, to remind us that not all of the "literature" with which we are concerned is contained with the covers of books,

Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, Movies, a Psychological Study (1950).

The provocative chapter headings are "Lovers and Loved Ones," "Parents and Children," "Killers and Victims," and "Performers and Onlookers."

See also Dr. Hoops's work, mentioned in the notes to Dr. Wyatt's paper.

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